

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, BL, CI
SUBJECT: BANZER ASKS US HELP IN RESTORING NORMALCY ALONG
BOLIVIA/CHILE BORDER

1. PRESIDENT BANZER CALLED ME TO HIS OFFICE APRIL 13 TO EXPRESS CONCERN OVER TENSIONS AND INTERRUPTED FRONTIER TRADE IN THE BOLIVIAN/CHILEAN BORDER REGION. BANZER SAID HE DOUBTED THE GOC HAD ORDERED ANY SUCH ACTIVITIES, BUT THAT CHILEAN REGIONAL COMMANDERS AND SUBALTERN OFFICIALS WERE APPARENTLY CARRYING OUT UNNECESSARY MANEUVERS AND PATROLS IN THE BORDER AREA AND INSPIRING INTERFERENCE WITH FRONTIER TRADE. (THE TWO EXAMPLES BANZER CITED WERE THAT LIVESTOCK WHICH WANDERED ACROSS THE BORDER WERE NOT RETURNED AND NORMAL CHILEAN TRAFFIC TO BOLIVIAN TOWNS FOR SHOPPING HAD BEEN ALLEGEDLY DISCOURAGED.) BANZER CLAIMED THE BOLIVIAN MILITARY WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THIS AND SAID HIS DESIRE WAS TO SEE ACTIVITY IN THE BORDER AREA RETURN TO NORMAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

2. HE SAID IT SHOULD BE CLEAR TO THE CHILIANS THAT BOLIVIA, DESPITE THE BREAK IN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS (ABOUT WHICH BANZER WAS QUITE SHEEPISH AND APOLOGETIC), HAD NEITHER THE DESIRE
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NOR ABILITY TO PRESENT ANY THREAT TO CHILE.

3. BANZER SAID HIS PURPOSE IN TELLING ME THIS WAS FIRST TO INFORM THE USG OF THE SITUATION AND SECOND TO ASK WHETHER WE COULD PUT IN A GOOD WORD WITH THE GOC TO SEE WHETHER IT COULD HELP RESTORE NORMALCY IN THE FRONTIER REGION.

4. I TOLD BANZER THAT BASED ON MY INFORMATION REGARDING THE GOC'S STANCE HE NEED NOT BE CONCERNED ABOUT ANY CHILEAN PROVOCATION; THE GOC WAS TAKING THE SITUATION VERY CALMLY. AS HE KNEW, OUR RELATIONS WITH CHILE WERE UNDER SOME STRAIN, BUT A DIALOGUE EXISTED. I WOULD SEE WHETHER WASHINGTON AND OUR AMBASSADOR IN SANTIAGO THOUGHT WE COULD ASK THE GOC WHETHER IT COULD TAKE SOME ADDITIONAL ACTION TO URGE ITS REGIONAL OFFICIALS AND COMMANDERS TO ASSURE THAT NORMAL CONDITIONS PREVAILED IN THE FRONTIER AREA.

5. COMMENT: BANZER'S "FACTS" SHOULD NOT BE ASSUMED TO BE ENTIRELY CORRECT, NOR ARE HIS MOTIVES EVER UNIDIMENSIONAL. THE GOB AT A LOWER LEVEL HAS MENTIONED SIMILAR CONCERNS TO THE AMBASSADOR OF VENEZUELA (WHICH REPRESENTS BOLIVIAN INTERESTS IN SANTIAGO). HE HAS BRUSHED OFF THE EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN AS ONE MORE BANZER EFFORT TO KEEP A FEW EXCUSES FOR CANCELLING ELECTIONS ON THE SHELF IN CASE THE MILITARY SHOULD DROP ITS GUARD AND GIVE BANZER AN OPENING TO TRY THIS. AS I HAVE TOLD THE VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR, EVEN IF THIS PREMISE IS CORRECT, THE CONCLUSION OF NO RESPONSE IS PROBABLY WRONG.

6. IF OUR FRAGILE DIALOGUE WITH THE GOC CAN TAKE THIS SLIGHT EXTRA LOAD, IT WOULD BE IN OUR INTEREST TO POINT OUT TO THE GOC THE DESIRABILITY OF THEIR DOING ALL POSSIBLE TO AVOID GIVING BOLIVIAN POLITICIANS ANY EXCUSE TO INFLAME REGIONAL TENSIONS FOR INTERNAL POLITICAL PURPOSES. IF THE DEPARTMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND SANTIAGO CONCUR THAT THIS CAN BE DONE, LIGHTLY, I RECOMMEND WE DO SO.

7. OBVIOUSLY THE GOC WILL NOT SHARE OUR VIEW OF THE DESIRABILITY OF ELECTIONS IN BOLIVIA, NOR SHOULD THIS BE THE BASIS OF ANY APPROACH WE MAKE IN SANTIAGO. SHOULD THIS ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM COME UP, HOWEVER, IT MAY BE USEFUL TO REMIND THE GOC THAT FRONT-RUNNING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JUAN PEREDA SENT A SPECIAL EMISSARY TO SANTIAGO TO AFFIRM HIS INTENTION TO PUT BOLIVIAN-CHILEAN RELATIONS BACK ON A NORMAL BASIS IF ELECTED. BOEKER

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